



RSVP Connections

Connecting Senior Volunteers with Community Needs

Spring 2006

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All RSVP volunteers bring along their unique gifts----their skills, knowledge, interests, and talents. They may bring a love of horses, history, or horticulture. They may have the gift of teaching children how to read, or how to look at the busy life in a pond. They may have the gift of music----whether it is singing, playing the piano, or dancing in rhythm. The experience of sharing these gifts with others, and knowing that it makes a difference in another's life, is part of the joy of volunteering

This issue focuses on RSVP volunteers who might not see themselves as having any special skills or talents. They do everyday things for the people they work with--- like a phone call a few times a week, meeting for a cup of coffee, preparing a hot meal, or sitting and listening to music together. Nothing extraordinary, they would say. Just what we all do together with friends and family.

These volunteers are doing these "everyday things" in extraordinary ways. They are serving in programs that reach out to those who tend to become isolated in our community... So the volunteer's phone call is a welcome event for an elderly person unable to leave the house, and whose family lives out of town. A cup of coffee is shared with someone experiencing chronic depression. A hot meal is prepared at a transitional shelter for men who have recently been released from prison. Music is shared with a patient in the last two days of life.

The common thread among these volunteers is their empathy and commitment to the human dignity of each person. The volunteers bring a sense of comfort and community to others----through the everyday activities shared by family and friends everywhere. It is not so much what is said or done during the time spent with the person, but that the volunteer is there with a smile, a listening ear, and a giving heart----what special gifts!

Pat Dowling
RSVP Coordinator

Mark Your Calendars— Tribute Day is September 29, 2006. Remember, you must have 20 hours on your RSVP timesheets 7/1/05-6/30/06.

Very important—Please complete the enclosed evaluation and return it with your May timesheet to help RSVP improve.

Sharing Friendship and Support Through Life's Challenges ...

...With those who have been in prison---

When Louise Koenig stopped by the RSVP display table in April 2005, she said, "I love to cook. And I'm interested in volunteering." Louise didn't realize it, but RSVP had been waiting a long time for a volunteer to say just those words! Several months before, "Cephas", a community-based organization that reaches out to prisoners and families, had contacted RSVP with a single request: A volunteer who wanted to cook. Like any good matchmaker, RSVP's next step was to introduce Louise to Cephas. Soon after, the match was made!

Louise now volunteers each Wednesday at Cephas House, a transitional shelter that opened 3 years ago. Up to 6 men who have been part of Cephas groups in prison may live at the House after they are released. Cephas House provides shelter, intense supervision, and job training. The parolees also learn to solve problems constructively and live as a family. The men spend each day at a work or volunteer site and then return home. Most nights the residents take turns preparing meals, but on Wednesday evenings, a weekly support group at the House is attended by Cephas residents, staff and volunteers, and other parolees already living in the community. Louise's cooking is an important part of these Wednesday gatherings. Instead of pizza or sub sandwiches, the group shares a home-cooked meal. One recent Wednesday afternoon, Louise was busy in the Cephas kitchen preparing a turkey dinner for the 5 residents and 7 guests expected for the support group... a turkey in the oven, a pumpkin cake cooling on the table, and vegetables getting washed and ready for the pot. The delicious smell of turkey filled the kitchen, and Seymour, the resident dog, came over to investigate for any treats. Ali, who had come to Cephas House after many years in prison, poured himself a cup of coffee and chatted with Louise while she worked. Much of the food comes from the Food Bank, or is purchased at the nearby grocery store. What Louise cooks on Wednesday depends on what the men have taken out to defrost. "Although they sometimes forget", she chuckled. On the other days of the week, all kitchen and household tasks are assigned to different residents. The men eat a meal together each evening in the dining room. Ali quickly added, "Of course, it's nicer when a woman cooks." Louise joked, "Sure, then you guys don't have to cook." Louise's cooking is held in great esteem because it is "from scratch"-



--no frozen or fast food on Wednesdays!

Louise, a retired nurse from ECMC, developed her skills and love of cooking very early. "My mother worked late hours, so I cooked for the family when I got home from school." Her aunt taught her how to shop well and prepare meals, and Louise now shares her cooking and shopping know-how with the men at Cephass. She adjusts the meals as she gets to know each resident, to include ethnic foods or low-salt or diabetic diets. The men are learning to prepare balanced meals, and to save money by using coupons and comparative shopping. Ali explained the importance of these lessons for himself and the other men: "The men have to learn to live by themselves. They have to learn to how to cook, shop, budget, hold a job and everything else. They have been in a place where they were told what and when to do everything. Now, they will be on their own for the first time in 10, 20, or more years."

Statistics show that 75% of Cephass graduates never return to prison, compared to an average of only 30% for all ex-offenders. One Cephass graduate, who came to Cephass House after 28 years of incarceration, says it best: "Because of the patience, support and love I received at Cephass House and from everyone connected with Cephass House, I was able to make that transition to standing on my own, with an apartment, a cat, a car and a good job."

With those at the end of life...

At the Veterans Administration Medical Center, a group of volunteers provides companionship to patients who have few or no family or friends that can visit. The volunteers know that they may be called in the middle of the night. The patient may not converse or even acknowledge the volunteer's presence. The patient may never know the volunteer's name, and may not open his or her eyes during the visit. But these volunteers have promised to be there as long as the patient needs them---whether a few days or just a few hours. In the patient's last hours of life, the volunteers are present so that the patient will not die alone, to give the patient one of the most valuable of human gifts: a death with dignity.

The VA's No One Dies Alone (NODA) program ensures that any patient in the last 48-72 hours of life need not be alone. The network of NODA volunteers operates 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The call for a NODA volunteer begins when the nursing staff identifies a patient in need of an end-of-life companion, and informs the NODA phone coordinator. The coordinator contacts the volunteers who form that week's team. From that point on, a volunteer will be at the patient's bedside until the moment of death.

NODA volunteers work closely with a team of VA staff. The staff provides important support for each NODA volunteer, from new volunteer training sessions, to monthly "debriefing sessions" to comfort care packs (made up of lip balm, a pen and notebook, cotton swabs, music CD's, spiritual readings, and other items) for each visit. On the palliative care unit, the nursing

staff and NODA volunteers have a deep mutual respect. Staff warmly welcome and thank each volunteer for being with their patients, and volunteers know that the staff will come quickly when the volunteer is concerned about a patient's comfort.

RSVP volunteers Fred Tomasello, Jr, and his wife Kathy Blair are among the original NODA volunteers and now provide mentoring for new volunteers. "The first call is the hardest. When Fred received his first call, he ran out of the house so fast he forgot to change out of his slippers." Both feel strongly that each NODA visit has been a moving and spiritual experience, a gift that they have received. Fred, who sometimes plays his dulcimer during a visit, described his experience as a NODA volunteer in a recent column in the Buffalo News:

"The only sounds in the room are the window air conditioner, the plinking of the harp-like music maker and Ms. J's rapid breathing. I play several songs, ... including my personal favorite, "Sweet Chariot." Experts also tell us that even though they may not physically respond, terminal patients can sense the presence of others in the room, even if we just sit quietly and read a book. Our presence is comforting. When I get home, I tell my wife, Kathy, about the patient. Kathy prepares to go to the VA Hospital at 6 p. m. and spend the night. However, a telephone call to the 9th floor confirms that Ms. J has passed away. Regretfully, I left just moments before that famous band of angels swung low, picked up Ms. J in their sweet chariot, and quietly carried the veteran home."

At a recent monthly session, other volunteers discussed their own response to the experience of being with another at the point of death:

"I was concerned about how I would react. But I now understand dying better as a part of life. I have found this experience to be very uplifting rather than sorrowful."

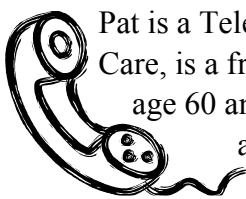
"It's rewarding and a little challenging. If it becomes overwhelming, I step outside the room for a moment. But I am glad that I became involved in the program. I've been a patient at the VA, and I see this as a good way to help my fellow veterans."

"It is a privilege to see this program blossom for our veterans. It is a privilege to be with those who are a blessing, and to be blessed in turn by this work."

With Friendly Conversation...

Six mornings a week, RSVP volunteer Pat Schanzer's home telephone becomes her volunteer site. Pat makes a phone call at 8AM to Marilyn, who tells Pat about her plans for that day.

"When I call her, she always answers with a smile on her voice," said Pat. "On the few days that I have forgotten to call, Marilyn calls me to say she's OK, and to check that I'm OK too."



Pat is a Telephone Assurance Program (TAP) volunteer. TAP, a program of Coordinated Care, is a free volunteer service that provides friendly and reassuring phone calls to seniors age 60 and over in Erie County to eliminate some of the concerns facing people who live alone, thereby assisting them to remain independent. TAP volunteers' calls provide an opportunity for seniors to socialize with someone, and to possibly de-

crease their feelings of loneliness and isolation. The TAP program also provides peace of mind to relatives who live out of town or unable to contact their family member on a regular basis.

Pat and her husband, Joe became TAP volunteers about 8 years ago, when the need for TAP volunteers was announced at the Clarence Senior Center. For the past few years, Joe called Al, a gentleman in his 90's, and Pat called Marilyn. When Joe passed away a few months ago, Pat decided that she would continue his dedicated calls six days a week to Al. "I told Al that he has a very nice voice for a man in his 90's," said Pat. "I think that made his day!"

RSVP volunteer June Alker is a TAP volunteer through the Amherst Senior Center. She calls four TAP members every Thursday, and other TAP volunteers from the Center call them on the other days of the week. Volunteers called one older man for years until he was placed in a skilled nursing facility, and upon his death, the family contacted each TAP volunteer to thank them for calling their father so faithfully. On another occasion, a volunteer became concerned when she could not reach the member that morning, and it was soon discovered he had fallen and was unable to get to the phone. "She saved the man's life," said June.

TAP calls are made on the days and times convenient for both the volunteer and the member. If a volunteer is out of town for a period, the TAP Coordinator makes sure that other volunteers make phone calls to the member. Best of all, a TAP volunteer can just pick up the phone to brighten someone's day!

...to bring light in darker times

Compeer of Greater Buffalo for 20 years has provided the gift of friendship to individuals experiencing mental illness, including seniors. When Compeer volunteers apply, they are asked to make just a one-year commitment, but many of the pairings grow into long-term friendships which endure for years.

Susan, a Compeer volunteer, decided to get involved with Compeer's senior program so that she could assist a senior who was dealing with the many difficulties accompanying the aging process. She was matched with Florence, and six years later their friendship continues based on mutual respect, understanding, and a shared love of shopping. "I can't believe it's been so long," said Susan. "I guess time does fly when you are having fun." Florence admits to being slightly apprehensive before their first meeting. "Now, we're just like sisters," comments Florence. "Susan is always there for me."

Many older adults experience sadness and loneliness as they advance in age, as family and friends move to different parts of the country, and other life changes occur. Dealing with depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses can be difficult. An estimated 20% of all senior citizens experience one of these maladies. Adding to the difficulties of dealing with mental

WELCOME NEW RSVP VOLUNTEERS...WE'RE GLAD YOU JOINED US

Amherst Senior Center – Sophie Lobo, Helen Machnyski, Alice N. McDonald, James F. Meier, Monica M. Meier, Julio A. Santiago, Rosario V. Triolo; **Baptist Manor** – Sylvia C. Crawford, Wanda L. Smith, Eileen F. Stelzle; **Beaver Meadow** – John J. Sly; **Bertrand Chaffee Hospital** – Marion H. Igel, Jacquelyn E. Patton; **B&EC Botanical Gardens** – Mary Fran Schneckenberger; **B&EC Meals on Wheels** – Thomas Schuler, Mary Ann G. Wiltshire; **B&EC Zoological Garden** – Frederick D. Hess, Bruce W. Wansart; **Buffalo General Hospital** – Dr. DeLois Anderson, Norman D. Brzezniak; **Clarence Senior Center** – Faye D. Jondle, Ruth C. Nowak; **Erie County Dept. of Mental Health** – Carolyn C. Moon; **Erie County Senior Fitness** – Shash Georgi; **Erie County Home** – Herbert J. Batt, Robert A. Bemis, Donald F. Blasiak, Virginia Coleman, Joan L. Costlow, Kathleen F. Czarnecki, Mary L. Fiato, Grace R. Gates, Celine S. Kingsley, Virginia H. Locher, William W. Miess, Ann Obermeier, William R. Obermeier, Kathryn E. Ponosny, Cathy Pudlewski, Shirley D. Schildkamp, Karen H. Shafer, Eugene A. Smith, Barbara M. Smyton, Paul C. Wangler, Marilyn E. Wilson; **Grand Island Golden Age Center** – Pete Gottler, Wanda M. Lorenz, June A. Marble, Ann M. Tubin, Donna A. Walker, Peter M. Wall; **HIICAP** – Donald L. Chretien, Gerald J. Gadra, **Mercy Hospital** – Nancy P. Williams; **Millard Fillmore (Gates) Hospital** – Roslyn Clune; **Morlock Foundation** – Barbara A. Woglom; **Operation Good Neighbor** – Patricia A. Linnan, Patricia H. Miller, Lucille J. Rohloff, Geertruida B. Swiader, Daniel L. Woyton; **Orchard Park Senior Center** – Mary D. Dominick; **RSVP/ Lifelong Learning Program** – James W. McGrath, Susan E. Naylor; Brian F. Wood; **Response to Love Center** – Kathleen A. Sisson; **Rural Transit** – James C. Fagan, Theresa J. Hilburger, Daniel J. Piedmonte, Jacqueline Shaw, Johnny F. Shaw; **St. Vincent de Paul** – James R. Burkard, Ruth J. Burkard; **Veteran's Administration Hospital** – Melanie Buscemi, Russell C. Jackson, Robert J. McTighe, Paul D. Schaefer, Leo M. Spengler, Maxine Spengler; **West Seneca Senior Center** – Patricia A. Barnhard, Ronald F. Barnhard, Allison P. Penrod, Dean A. Penrod; **WNED** – Patricia K. Gardon, Jonni Moore, Robert F. Ulmer

illness, older individuals may become increasingly isolated from the support they need. Compeer hopes to serve at least 60 older adults in Erie County this year. If you'd like to be that special someone to an older adult experiencing the isolation and loneliness of mental illness, or would like more information, call the RSVP office at 858-7548.

And a special welcome to our newest members of the RSVP Advisory Council----

Barbara Blackburn: Barbara not only teaches classes and writes articles on travel and culinary topics, but she's also an English instructor. She combines her two loves in her Lifelong Learning Course this Spring "Literature that You Can Eat." Barbara would especially like to increase RSVP's appeal to recent retirees and the upcoming Boomer generation.

Do you have questions about services and programs for older adults?

Erie County Department of Senior Services can help—Call 858-8526.

Information about many programs and services are also available on the web at
www.erie.gov/depts/seniorservices

Fern Koch. Fern is a respected volunteer management consultant and has held many leadership positions in the volunteer world: Executive Director of the Camp Fire Council, President of the Girl Scout Council, Treasurer of the Lupus Foundation, and a Chairperson of the United Way's Volunteer Services Committee. Fern has assisted other non-profit Boards and Councils to be more effective, and RSVP is happy that she has agreed to bring her skills to our Council.

If you'd like to join the Advisory Council, please call Pat Dowling at 858-7548.

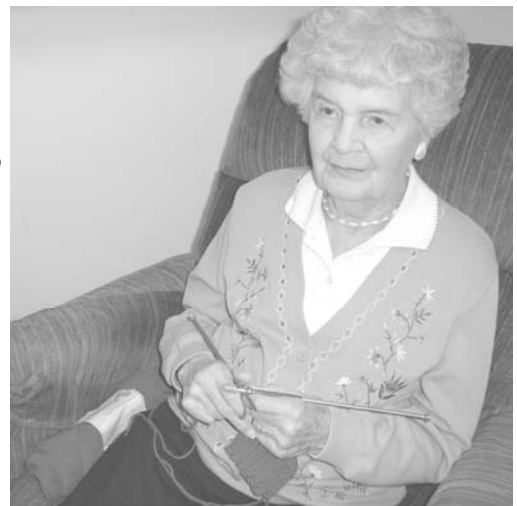
Hats Off to These RSVP Volunteers!

Marie Young and the Wende Guild—The new automatic front door at the Erie County Home is a source of great pride to RSVP Volunteer Marie Young and the 13 members of the Wende Guild, because it was purchased last year with the proceeds of two retail stores staffed and operated by the all-volunteer Guild in the Home's basement. "The door makes it easier for residents and visitors using wheelchairs, canes, and walkers to come in and out by themselves" In addition to the door, all proceeds benefit the Home's 550 residents in some way. Last year, the Guild distributed 5 pairs of socks and \$10 to each resident. Marie, who had no sales or business experience when she started at the store in 1986, now does all the buying, inventory and bookwork. A recipient of the President's Lifetime Service Award, Marie has given over 25,000 hours of service at the Erie County Home! Pictured is RSVP volunteer Barbara Smyton at the Wende Guild boutique, assisting shopper Kathy Rudnicki.



HIICAP Volunteers —RSVP salutes the RSVP volunteers in the Health Insurance Information & Counseling Program (HIICAP) who help seniors and their families understand their health insurance options under the new Medicare Part D benefit. At community presentations, one-on-one meetings, or logged onto the Medicare Part D's website, these trained volunteers provide invaluable assistance with many questions----Thanks to HIICAP volunteers: Dottie Kruczynski, David Trumpfheller, Bob Wood, Dorothy Hanson, Diane Mahoney, Mary Ann Wiltshire, Mary Kowalczyk, Gerry Gadra, Don Chretien, and Mike Metlak.

Grand Island Golden Age Center Volunteers —When HIICAP needed help putting together over 4,000 bright yellow folders of information about the new Medicare Part D benefit, they turned to RSVP. And RSVP turned to Grand Island Golden Age Center's 20 RSVP volunteers. This energetic group has been described as "a well-oiled machine." The Center turned into an efficient assembly line of which Henry Ford would have been proud! So if you see someone carrying one of those bright yellow Medicare folders, remember RSVP's role.



Lillian Carpenter is part of Grand Island Golden Age Center's "production" team working on each RSVP

special project, and even when she goes home, she's still volunteering. Lillian kept many little hands and heads warm this year.

Through the Center's "Mitten Program", members knit mittens, hats and scarves that are distributed to Women & Children's Hospital, Salvation Army, St. Luke's Shelter, and Community Missions. Lillian made 216 mittens, 110 hats, and 117 baby hats. By the way, Lillian (at right) is 98-years-old, and volunteered during World War One (yes, One) knitting helmet liners and scarves for the soldiers!



Ann Constantino - RSVP volunteer Ann Constantino and her jump roping prowess are now world famous! This photo of 83-year-old Ann, mid-air in front of two girls in her summer youth activities program, received Honorable Mention in the United/MetLife Foundation Intergenerational Photography Contest. Ann is a volunteer Senior Fitness leader at North Buffalo Community Center. The photo was taken and submitted by Richard Derwald, of the Dept. of Senior Services' Senior Fitness Program. Congratulations to Ann and Richard!

Virginia Figura - RSVP Volunteer Virginia Figura was nominated for the community

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